

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: CHALAT'S PROMOTION AND KRIT'S ILLNESS

REF: DOA PR150626Z APR 76

SUMMARY. GEN. KRIT SIWARA, FORMER COMMANDER OF THAI ARMY, IS DOWN WITH AN ILLNESS WHICH MIGHT BE PARTLY POLITICAL. PROMOTION OF GENERAL CHALAT HIRANYASIRI TO DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THAI ARMY, WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATIONS WITH RTA COMMANDER, SUPREME COMMANDER OR DEFENSE COUNCIL, HAS CREATED UNNECESSARY FURTHER PROBLEM FOR NEW GOVERNMENT. ONCE KRIT BECOMES DEFENSE MINISTER, AS NOW EXPECTED, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHAT HE WILL DO TO REMEDY PROBLEM CAUSED BY PROMOTION, BUT WE BELIEVE HE WILL EFFECTIVELY NEUTRALIZE CHALAT. END OF SUMMARY.

1. THE FORMATION OF A NEW CABINET WAS COMPLICATED SLIGHTLY BY THE SUDDEN ILLNESS OF GEN. KRIT SIWARA, FORMER COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY (RTA), WHO WAS ADMITTED TO PHRA MONGKUT HOSPITAL ON APRIL 16 COMPLAINING OF CHEST
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PAINS. "ON DOCTOR'S ORDERS" HE HAS LIMITED THE NUMBER

OF VISITORS. AMONG THESE HE HAS CONSENTED TO SEE WERE RTA COMMANDER GEN. BUNCHAI BAMRUNGPHONG, GEN. CHOT HIRANYATHITI, WHO RESIGNED IN PROTEST AGAINST HIS TRANSFER FROM DEPUTY RTA COMMANDER TO AN INACTIVE POST, AND MG FUANGCHALOEI ANIRUTTHEWA, PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT'S AID-DE-CAMP. THE LATTER SAID THAT KRIT HAD TOLD HIM THAT HE WAS SICK BECAUSE HE "ATE TOO MUCH STICKY RICE AND MANGO AND PLAYED TOO MUCH GOLF". ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT KRIT'S ILLNESS IS NOT SERIOUS.

2. BECAUSE OF THE TIMING OF HIS ILLNESS, SPECULATION IS WIDESPREAD IN BANGKOK THAT THE CAUSE OF GENERAL KRIT'S ILLNESS WAS IN PART "POLITICAL". IT IS SAID THAT HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF A CASE OF INDISGESTION AND A SLIGHT HEART CONDITION, TO AVOID COMMENTING ON DEFENSE MINISTER PRAMAN ADIRESAN'S ACTION OF SUDDENLY PROMOTING GENERAL CHALAT HIRANYASIRI TO DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THE RTA. (SEE DAO REFTTEL).

3. PRAMAN'S ACTION HAS CAUSED A FUROR WITHIN POLITICAL CIRCLES AS WELL AS IN THE MILITARY. IT HAS CREATED AN UNWANTED PROBLEM FOR THE NEW DEMOCRAT-LED GOVERNMENT. DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS TO FORM A COALITION SOME OF THE DEMOCRATS WHO HAD NEVER RELISHED THE IDEA OF A COALITION WITH THE THAI NATION PARTY SEIZED UPON PRAMAN'S ACTION TO ARGUE AGAINST INCLUDING THE TNP IN THE NEW COALITION. BUT COOLER HEADS PREVAILED AND A COMPROMISE SOLUTION WAS REACHED. A STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED BY THE PRESS TO PRAMAN THAT PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT CHANGED HIS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSFERS IN ORDER TO PROMOTE GENERAL CHALAT, BROUGHT A QUICK REBUTTAL FROM KHUKRIT, WHO IN EFFECT CALLED PRAMAN A LIAR. PRAMAN LATER ISSUED A STATEMENT TAKING FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DECISION.

4. ONCE KRIT BECOMES DEFENSE MINISTER, HE WILL HAVE THE POWER TO OVERTURN PRAMAN'S DECISION OR AT THE LEAST TO NEUTRALIZE THE EFFECTS OF HIS ACTION. AT THIS TIME IT IS NOT CLEAR WHAT HE WILL DO, BUT WE BELIEVE HE WILL EFFECTIVELY NEUTRALIZE CHATLAT. WHATEVER HE DOES WILL BE COMPLICATED BY THE FACT THAT EX-DEFENSE MINISTER
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PRAMAN WILL BE IN THE CABINET, READY TO DEFEND HIS ACTIONS AND HIS INTERESTS.

5. PRAMAN'S MOTIVATIONS IN THIS WHOLE AFFAIR ARE UNCLEAR. AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE, HE CERTAINLY HAD THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE NEW APPOINTMENTS IN THE THAI ARMED FORCES, BUT CUSTOM (AND GOOD SENSE) CLEARLY CALLED FOR HIM TO MAKE SURE HE HAD GENERAL AGREEMENT BEFORE MAKING SUCH

APPOINTMENTS. MOREOVER, AS CARETAKER MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND WITHIN A FEW DAYS OF RELINQUISHING THIS POST, HE HAD ADDITIONAL REASONS FOR TAKING NO RPT NO CONTROVERSIAL ACTIONS. HE MAY HAVE SOUGHT TO REWARD GENERAL CHALAT FOR SUPPORT DURING PRAMAN'S PREVIOUS BRUSH WITH GENERAL KRIT LAST SEPTEMBER OVER OTHER APPOINTMENTS IN THE ARMED FORCES. PRAMAN MAY HAVE SOUGHT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE STILL HAS POWER AND INFLUENCE IN THE ARMED FORCES. HAD KRIT'S RECENT ILLNESS BEEN A SERIOUS ONE (AND ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT IT WAS NOT), PRAMAN MIGHT CONCEIVABLY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PUSH GENERAL CHALAT AS THE NEXT COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY WHEN THE INCUMBENT, GENERAL BUNCHAI, RETIRES NEXT SEPT 30. AS THINGS STAND NOW, GENERAL KRIT WILL PROBABLY MAKE THE DECISION ON THE NEXT RTA COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, AND PRAMAN COMES OUT OF THE WHOLE AFFAIR WITH HIS POSITION DAMAGED TO SOME EXTENT.

6. ON THE WHOLE, WE DOUBT THAT THE LAST-MINUTE APPOINTMENT OF GENERAL CHALAT WILL HAVE MUCH EFFECT WITHIN THE THAI ARMED FORCES. HOWEVER, WE WILL CONTINUE TO REVIEW THE SITUATION OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS.
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